

5

NON-CONTACT PROFILE MEASUREMENT SYSTEM

INVENTORS

Michael Harris

Andy Hidle

10 Ben Burdette

CLAIM OF PRIORITY

This application claims priority to co-pending U.S. provisional patent application entitled, "NON-CONTACT COMPUTER CONTROL MEASUREMENT 15 OF A WORK PIECE," having ser. no. 60/422,765, filed on 10/31/2002, the disclosure of which is incorporated herein by reference, in its entirety.

TECHNICAL FIELD

20 The present invention is generally related to measurement systems, and more particularly to a non-contact profile measurement system. The measurement system is suitable for use in, for example, continuous process manufacturing as well as other applications.

25

BACKGROUND OF THE INVENTION

In certain processes, such as manufacturing processes, it is necessary to evaluate work product in order to assure that it meets specifications or otherwise falls within predetermined criteria. For example, in extrusion processes, such as tire manufacturing, rubber material is extruded and linearly drawn into a 30 predetermined shape for use in the tire. It is important that the shape or profile of this extruded material meet predetermined design specifications. Often this determination is made via comparing a profile representing product that meets specifications with the profile of a sample of product. Several methods of evaluating such product are known and include the use of optical comparators

5 and/or offline inspection machines. Using these machines, a cross section of product is sampled and visually compared with a reference profile by an operator to determine/assess whether or not the sample falls within the specification profile. The accuracy and reliability of this method is highly contingent upon the operator. In short, it is only as good as the operator carrying out the visual
10 comparison.

It is also common for personnel to utilize mechanical measurement tools, such as micrometers to physically measure a product sample to assess its compliance with specifications. Again, the accuracy of this method is highly
15 contingent upon the operator and consistent results can not be guaranteed. With respect to work product that is nominally round in shape, devices known as shadow gauges, such as the LaserMike™ laser micrometer by Beta LaserMike, Inc., are often employed to check the diameter of work product. These devices do not however, allow for determining anything more than cross sectional dimensions in a predetermined reference plane. Further, as the work product
20 may move within a given work zone, the dimension measured by the shadow gauge may not be the dimension of interest at a given time due to the movement of the work product.

25 In order to determine if the extruded product meets specification, it is common for production to be stopped at predetermined intervals to allow a sample of the extruded rubber product to be obtained for evaluation/comparison. This means production time is lost during the process of obtaining a sample. Further, since samples are taken typically at predetermined intervals, if product
30 begins to fall out of specification between samples intervals, product output is lost before corrective action can be taken to bring the production back into spec. This results in lost time and wasted production.

5 In an effort to work around the short-comings of the known
inspection/evaluation methods, off-line inspection systems have been adapted to
on-line processes. There are known systems that utilize, for example, motorized
positioning devices to transport one and/or position one or more measuring
instruments within a predetermined region of interest. The region of interest will
10 typically be adjacent to or surrounding an area or path along which work product
is passed during a manufacturing process. These systems do not, however,
provide information about all points of interest at the same point in time. If the
product moves during measurement, then the data does not accurately represent
the product. Another drawback to this method is the initial cost and maintenance
15 cost for such a motorized mechanism.

More recently, machine-vision approaches have been utilized to assess
the shape and profile of in-process work-product. "Smart camera" sensors from
companies such as DVT, Inc. or Cognex, Inc. and structured light sources from
20 companies such as Lasiris, Inc. can be combined to form a rudimentary
measurement system. These systems suffer from inaccuracies due to non-
linearity in the optics associated with the structured light sources and/or
imperfections in the alignment of components that comprise the structured light
source. Further, these systems do not provide the ability to inspect (evaluate)
25 the entire profile of a work piece.

Other systems may have been introduced which incorporate an array of
pre-calibrated contour sensors to allow for in-process inspection/evaluation of the
complete shape and/or profile of a work piece during the manufacturing process.
30 As each sensor in these systems must be registered (correlated) to a common
coordinate space in order to allow collected data to be properly represented in
relation to data collected by other sensors in the system and the work piece itself,
efforts must be made to establish a correlation between the various coordinate

5 spaces associated with each of the sensor devices and the work piece. The process for establishing a correlation between various the coordinate spaces associated with each sensor and a common coordinate space has been time consuming and cumbersome.

10 Further, these systems do not allow for the comparison of a work piece profile (as represented by captured profile data) with a predetermined reference profile, independent of the orientation of the work piece profile at the time of inspection/evaluation. These systems also present challenges in minimizing the areas of a work piece profile that are at least partially obscured from detection by
15 one or more of the sensors.

Thus, a heretofore unaddressed need exists in the industry to address the aforementioned deficiencies and inadequacies.

20 **SUMMARY OF THE INVENTION**

The present invention provides a system and method for measuring features and dimensions related to the profile of a work piece. Briefly described, in architecture, the system can be implemented as follows. A sensor unit is provided that is configured to capture the profile of an object within a predetermined work zone and output data representative of said object. A control unit for receiving and processing data received from said sensor chassis is also provided.

30 In a further embodiment, a non-contact measurement system is provided that includes a sensor unit. The sensor unit is preferably configured to determine the diameter of a work piece

5 The present invention can also be viewed as providing a method for evaluating a profile of a work piece. In this regard, the method can be broadly summarized by the following steps: correlating the coordinate space associated with two or more contour sensors with a common coordinate space; and generating profile data representing a profile of a predetermined work piece. In a
10 further embodiment, a method of registering a sensor into a predetermined coordinate space is provided. The method includes the steps of receiving data representing the profile of a predetermined target; determining the X and Y coordinates and center point for the target; and determining translation parameters based upon the received data and the determined X and Y
15 coordinates and the center point.

Other features and advantages of the present invention will become apparent to one with skill in the art upon examination of the following drawings and detailed description. It is intended that all such additional features and
20 advantages be included herein within the scope of the present invention.

BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF THE DRAWINGS

The invention can be better understood with reference to the following drawings. The components in the drawings are not necessarily to scale,
25 emphasis instead being placed upon clearly illustrating the principles of the present invention. Moreover, in the drawings, like reference numerals designate corresponding parts throughout the several views.

30 FIG. 1A and FIG. 1B are block diagrams illustrating a representation of an embodiment of measurement system 100.

FIG. 2A - FIG. 2D are block diagrams showing representations of an embodiment of sensor chassis 200.

5 FIG. 2E and FIG. 2F are block diagrams illustrating the orientation of the sensor chassis 200 with a work zone and a work piece.

FIG. 2G is a block diagram showing a further representation of an embodiment of a contour sensor 210.

FIG. 2H is a block diagram showing a representation of diction unit 240.

10 FIG. 2I is a diagram illustrating a plot of points representing a captured profile within a coordinate space.

FIG. 3A is a block diagram showing a further representation of an embodiment of control unit 300.

15 FIG. 3B is a flowchart illustrating a method of measuring dimensions of a profile.

FIG. 3C is a block diagram providing a further illustration for explaining the method of FIG. 3B.

FIG. 3D is a flowchart illustrating a method of determining an angle of interest of on a profile.

20 FIG. 3E is a block diagram providing a further illustration for explaining the method of FIG. 3D.

FIG. 3F is a flowchart illustrating a method of determining a radius and/or curve of a feature in a profile.

25 FIG. 3G is a block diagram providing a further illustration for explaining the method of FIG. 3F.

FIG. 3H is a flowchart illustrating a method of identifying errors in a profile.

FIG. 3I and FIG. 3J are block diagrams for explaining a method of determining degree of fit.

30 FIG. 3K is a flowchart illustrating a method of translating data to obtain a best match quality.

FIG. 3L is a diagram describing a correlation between a first coordinate space and a second coordinate space.

5 FIG. 3M and FIG. 3N are diagrams illustrating a method of registration of a sensor into coordinate space.

FIG. 3O is a block diagram illustrating an embodiment of control unit 300.

FIG. 4A and FIG. 4B are block diagrams illustrating an embodiment of a registration target 475.

10 FIG. 4C is a block diagram illustrating registration target 475 installed in sensor chassis 200 during a registration process.

FIG. 4D is a diagram illustrating the process of establishing a correlation between a first coordinate space (sensor coordinate space) and a second coordinate space (chassis coordinate space).

15

DETAILED DESCRIPTION

The present invention is directed to a non-contact system and method for capturing data (profile data) representing a profile of a predetermined work piece. The system is configured to provide for in-process measurement/evaluation of 20 the work piece. In operation, the system generates a digital representation of the dimensional attributes of the profile of a work piece as it is passed along a predetermined work path. The work path will preferably be routed so that the work piece passes within a predetermined detection range.

25 In a preferred embodiment, the system is configured to provide for display of a visual representation of a work piece for human evaluation. The displayed representation is based upon captured profile data. Further, in a preferred embodiment, the system is configured to provide for objective evaluation of a work piece based upon a displayed visual representation. The system may 30 include tools for determining, for example, widths, thicknesses, radii and angles relevant to a work piece as shown in a displayed visual representation. These tools may be implemented in software. Further details and descriptions of the invention are set out below.

5

FIG. 1A and FIG. 1B are block diagrams illustrating a representation of an embodiment of a measurement system 100 according to the invention. A sensor holding chassis (sensor chassis) 200 is provided, along with a control unit 300 and a display 425. The sensor chassis 200 is configured to capture the profile (profile capture) of a work piece 85 located within the work zone 75 by generating and outputting data representing at least a portion of the profile of a work piece 85 that is located within the work zone 75.

In a preferred embodiment, the sensor chassis 200 is configured to include one or more contour sensors (not shown), each for generating data representing an array of dimensional points representative of at least a portion of the profile of a work piece located within the work zone 75. The work zone 75 is a space in which a work piece 85 (FIG. 2A, FIG. 2B) may be placed or otherwise fed for evaluation.

20

The sensor chassis 200 is preferably interfaced with control unit 300 to exchange data and instructions. The sensor chassis 200 may be interfaced with control unit 300 either directly or via a network (not shown). In a preferred embodiment, the sensor chassis is configured to be compliant with the *Institute of Electrical and Electronic Engineers*, IEEE 1394 standard (also referred to as "firewire" or "i-link"). Display 425 is preferably included for displaying information in accordance with instructions received from the control unit 300.

SENSOR CHASSIS

30

FIG. 2A through 2D are block diagrams showing representations of an embodiment of sensor chassis 200. In these examples sensor chassis 200 is configured to include one or more contour sensors 210, 212, 214 and 216, respectively.

5

In a preferred embodiment, the contour sensors are optical devices each of which has a predetermined field of view (FOV). The FOV may also be referred to as the detection range of the sensor. An object within the FOV of the contour sensor will preferably be detectable by the contour sensor in that the contour sensor can receive light reflected from the object and generate an output in response thereto. The work zone 75 is preferably delineated so that a work piece 85 that is within the work zone 75 is within the FOV of one or more of the contour sensors 210, 212, 214 and 216. FIG. 2C shows the field of views F1, F2, F3, and F4 for each of the contour sensors 210, 212, 214 and 216, respectively. In this example, the FOV of each contour sensor covers a substantial portion of the work zone 75.

The sensor chassis 200 is preferably configured to position each of the contour sensors 210, 212, 214 and 216 in a predetermined alignment with work zone 75. They are also preferably positioned so a full 360° profile of a work piece 85 may be collectively captured by the contour sensors 210, 212, 214 and 216. In one embodiment, the contour sensors are radially aligned with the work zone 75. Further, they are preferably equally spaced about the circumference of the work zone 75 (i.e. at 90° intervals from each other). In a preferred embodiment, the sensor chassis is rotatable about the work zone 75. By rotating the sensor chassis the alignment of the contour sensors 210, 212, 214 and 216 in relation to the work zone 75 may be varied or adjusted as desired and insure that all details of the work piece profile can be captured by one or more of the contour sensors.

30

The sensor chassis may also be configured in size, shape or form that enable contour sensors to be positioned in desired location relative to areas/ports of the work product to be measured. A further alternate configuration includes a

5 linear arrangement of contour sensors positioned above and below a wide and narrow work product.

With reference to FIG. 2E and FIG. 2F the operation of sensor chassis 200 will be discussed. During operation, the sensor chassis 200 is placed along 10 a work path 76 via which a work piece 85 travels during a particular production process. The sensor chassis 200 will be placed so that the work path 76 defines an axis Z along which the work zone 75 is defined. In these examples, the work piece 85 is cylindrical in shape and is fed through the work zone 75 along the work path 76. In this way, the profile of work piece 85 may be captured via the 15 respective contour sensors 210, 212, 214 and 216 of sensor chassis 200.

FIG. 2G and FIG. 2H are diagrams showing representations of further embodiments of sensor chassis 200. FIG. 2G shows a sensor chassis 200 that is configured in a generally square shape with contour sensor 210, 212, 214 and 216 supported in position thereon. FIG. 2F shows a perspective view of the sensor chassis embodiment previously shown and discussed with respect to FIG. 2A and 2D.

FIG. 2I is a block diagram showing a representation of an embodiment of 25 a contour sensor 210. It will be recognized that each of the contour sensors 210, 212, 214 and 216 are preferably the same in configuration, thus a discussion of contour sensor 210 is equally applicable to contour sensors 212, 214 and 216. It can be seen that contour sensor 210 includes an illumination unit 230 and a detector unit 240. The illumination unit 230 is configured to generate and output a 30 beam or sheet of light "A". The illumination unit 230 is preferably positioned so that the output beam of light A will be directed into the work zone 75. Where a work piece 85 is present within the work zone 75, at least a portion of the beam of light A will be reflected from the work piece 85. The detector unit 240 is

5 positioned so as to be aligned to receive at least a portion of the beam of light A
that is reflected from the work piece 85.

The illumination unit 230 may be, for example, a laser or white light source. It may be, for example, a structured light source configured to output a
10 "sheet of light". In a preferred embodiment illumination unit 230 is a laser line generator such as the Lasiris™ SNF Series Structured Light Projector. Detector unit 240 may be configured to include an imager, for example, a charge coupled device (CCD) imager such as the Sony ICX204AL series CCD detector. Alternatively, the detector may be configured to include a complementary metal
15 oxide semiconductor (CMOS) imager such as the FillFactory IBIS4 series CMOS detector. In a preferred embodiment, the detector unit 240 is a CCD imager comprising an array of 1024 pixels by 768 pixels. The detector unit 240 may also be configured to include optics for focusing light onto an imager, such as CCD imager or CMOS imager.

20 There are various types of known contour sensors in existence. They include those sensors known as "structured light triangulation" types, such as the M2D sensor family manufactured by MEL ; "flying spot triangulation" types, such as the LMI/Selcom SPS2301 sensor and "flying spot time of flight", such as the SICK LMS 200 Laser Measurement System . Structured light triangulation
25 sensors have previously been described in "*Sheet-of-light Range Imaging*", *Mattias Johannesson, Linkoping Studies in Science and Technology. Dissertations No. 399 SIMD Architectures for Range and Radar Imaging, Linkoping 1995*". Further, the contour sensors may be configured as ultrasonic sensors responsive to ultrasonic radiation, Stereo Imaging sensors, Scanning
30 Moire Interferometry™, etc. The contour sensors 210, 212, 214 and 216 may be implemented as any one of the several known contour sensor types.

5 Each of the contour sensors is uniquely aligned with the workspace 75. When a work piece 75 is in the work zone 85, it will preferably be within the FOV of one or more of the contour sensors 210-216. As each contour sensor emits its respective light beam, it strikes the work piece 75 and is reflected, at least in part, back to the detector unit 240 of the contour sensor. In response, the
10 detector unit will generate an output signal S representative of the sensor coordinates describing the profile of the work piece 75 within the sensor coordinate plane. This output signal S is then output to the control unit 300. Each contour sensor is preferably attached to the sensor chassis 200 via an interface (not shown) that allows the contour sensor to be aligned so that the light
15 beam emitted by the contour sensor corresponds to a predetermined plane. In a preferred embodiment, each of the contour sensors 210, 212, 214 and 216 are aligned so that the light beams emitted by each contour sensor is substantially aligned along a common plane (plane of inspection). In one embodiment, the interface is configured as a three-point interface (not shown).

20
In order to minimize interference caused by a sensor unit responding to the light output by an adjacent sensor unit, the respective illumination units of each sensor unit may be configured to output light having different wavelengths. Similarly, the detector units of each sensor unit may be configured to be
25 responsive only to the wavelength of light emitted by the corresponding illumination unit thereof. In one embodiment, sensor unit 210 and 214 are configured to emit and respond to light having a first wavelength (for example, 635nm), while sensor units 212 and 216 are configured to emit and respond to light having a second wavelength (for example 690nm). Additionally, optical
30 filters may be placed within the optical path of each sensor unit to allow light of only a predetermined wavelength to pass through to the sensor unit.

5 FIG. 2I is diagram illustrating a further embodiment of detection unit 240. The detection unit 240 may be configured to include an imager 242 for receiving light and generating a signal in response to the received light, and a conversion unit 244 for converting the signal generated by the imager into a predetermined data format. In one embodiment of the contour sensor 210, the detection unit 240
10 is implemented as, for example, a CCD line imager having an imager array of 1024 columns of 768 pixels. Depending on the position at which the target is located and the angle at which reflected light is received by the CCD imager, certain pixels within one or more of the 1024 columns will respond by generating an output voltage. As the beam of light received from the illuminator unit will be
15 very narrow, only a small number of pixels within each column will be excited. The output of all 1024 columns will collectively represent at least a portion of the work piece from which light is reflected and received by the CCD imager.

20 FIG. 2K is a diagram illustrating an image of a work piece 75 in the un-
calibrated pixel coordinate space of the sensor unit. In this example, a profile of
the work piece 85 is represented by a series of points running from 0 to 1024 in the
X direction and from 0 to 281 in the Y direction. Each of the points is described by
25 a corresponding X and Y coordinate value. In a preferred embodiment, the Y axis
value is calculated by determining the centroid of the image of the structured light
source. The purpose of the centroid calculation is to yield resolution beyond that
offered by each pixel boundary (sub-pixel resolution). Further, the uncorrected
data may be corrected in both the X and Y dimensions before being output from
30 the contour sensor to eliminate inaccuracies due to the triangulation principle itself,
imaging optics, the optics producing the structured light, and/or imperfections in
the relative alignments between all these elements.

A preferred method of correction may be carried out by use of a look up table (LUT). In this method a look-up table is created during a predetermined

5 calibration procedure. The LUT defines an association between a set of known displacements (in world units, such as microns) with a set of pixel centroid values. Each of these data pairs can be considered a "look-up node". For each measured Y value in pixels, the nearest bounding look-up nodes above and below the measured value are determined. The corrected measurement value may then be
10 calculated to be the same proportion between the world-unit look-up values as the proportion between the pixel unit look-up values.

15 The X axis value for each data pair may then be corrected in a similar manner to the vertical (Y axis) correction, where two known horizontal references that are contained in a look-up table are utilized to interpolate the horizontal (X axis) pixel value into a horizontal real-world value.

20 The sensor imager is refreshed at a predetermined cycle or specific instance. An (X,Y) pixel data pair is determined for each of the 1024 columns in the imager for each cycle or instance. This (X,Y) pixel data is preferably converted into (X,Y) world units by the contour sensor processing unit 244, and then output to the control unit 300. It should be noted that the contour sensor processing unit 244 is not required to be physically inside the contour sensor 240. The functions thereof may be performed by any processing resource so assigned, such as a
25 personal computer. The functions of processing unit 244 may also be alternatively carried out by controller 300.

30 In a further embodiment, the sensor unit 210 is configured to measure the diameter and/or the center point of a work piece 85 that is at least nominally round in shape. In this embodiment, the sensor unit 210 receives light reflected from a work piece 85. In turn, the detection unit 240 outputs data representing points along the profile of the work piece. The profile data is fed to processing unit 244. The processing unit 244 receives the profile data and determines a diameter of the

5 work piece 75 based upon the received profile. In a preferred embodiment, the diameter and/or the center point of a work piece is calculated by the conversion unit based upon a non linear regression fitting of data to a circle of either known or unknown diameter. These methods are known to those persons skilled in the art.

10 CONTROL UNIT

FIG. 3A further illustrates a representative embodiment of control unit 300 (FIG. 1A). The control unit 300 is preferably configured to include a visualization module 362, a measurement module 364, a correlation module 366, registration module 368 and template matching module 370.

15

Visualization Module

The visualization module 362 is configured to display text or graphical information for viewing on an associated display device 425. The measurement module 362 is configured to carry out predetermined calculations and/or 20 measurements with respect to a predetermined work piece. Such calculations and measurements may include, but not be limited to, determining lengths or distances between two points, determining the angle between two lines, determining the radii and center point for an arc that is identified to be of interest. Further, the measurement module may be configured to determine the degree of 25 fit between the detected profile and a known "reference" profile.

Measurement Module

With reference to the flowchart of FIG. 3B a process of measuring parameters of a captured profile will be described. Methods are described for 30 determining Lengths and Widths, Angles, Circles and Arcs, and Degree of Fit

Measurement Module – Lengths and Widths

Data describing a control point (CP) is received (380). Additional data describing

5 a 2nd control point is received (382). The distance between these two control points is then determined based upon known characteristics of the coordinate space in which the control points exist (384). In one embodiment, data describing control points (CP) is generated in response to user inputted constraints.

10

Selection of control points may be carried out, for example, via using a pointing device, such as an associated mouse 325 (FIG. 3O) to identify/select relevant control points in the window view 427 shown on display 425. The selected control points are denoted herein via graphical pointers.

15

In FIG. 3C, the display window 427 shows a screen view depicting the profile of a work piece 75. The profile of the work piece 75 is in the general shape of a cross. Display 425 displays a screen view that is representative of the work piece profile within the chassis coordinate system. Here a display window 20 427 is displayed on display device 425. The 2 dimensional window is referred to as the "window coordinate space". This window coordinate space directly corresponds to the chassis coordinate system. The view displayed on display 425 will preferably be a directly scaled representation of the chassis coordinate system. Thus, dimensions shown in the displayed screen view can be used to 25 determine the actual dimensions of a work piece 75. Selection of control points may be carried out algorithmically, for example, by using a pointing device, such as an associated mouse 325 (FIG. 3O) to identify/select relevant control point constraints in the screen view shown on display window 427.

30

In this example, control points 302 and 303 have been selected by a user, preferably via clicking on the desired point with a pointing device 325 (FIG. 3O). The distance 301 between the two control points 302 and 303 is shown to be 2.63. Similarly, control points 304 and 305 are selected and the distance 306

5 between them is shown to be 3.23.

Measurement Module - Angles

The flowchart of FIG. 3D illustrates a method of determining the angle of a given feature of a captured profile. FIG. 3E is a block diagram representing an embodiment of the invention in which angle measurements can be made based on a displayed profile. In this method, data describing a first control point is received (386). The first control point will preferably be the vertices of two lines, the angle between which is of interest. The control point may be selected/identified by a user via, for example, a pointing device 325, as described and discussed above with respect to the method illustrated in FIG. 3B. Data describing a second control point is received (387). This second control point will represent an end point of one of the two lines, the angle between which is of interest. Data describing a 3rd control point is received (388). This third control point will be the end point of the second line. The three control points have now defined two lines. The angle between these two lines is determined (389).

FIG. 3E shows a display window 427 that depicts a profile of a work piece 85. A first control point 307 is denoted, as is a second control point 308 and a third control point 309. The angle 310 between the line 311 (defined by control points 307 and 308) and the line 312 (defined by the control points 307 and 309) is shown to be 103.3 by an indicia 313.

Measurement Module – Circles and Arcs

FIG. 3F is a flowchart illustrating a method of determining the radius and/or center point of a curve or arc that is identified to be of interest. Data is received that describes a series of digitized (X,Y) data points (390). These digitized points will generally define an arc. A best fit will be determined for the arc defined by the selected digitized points (391). In one embodiment, the best fit

5 to curve may be carried out using known principals of regression. Once a circle has been determined that best fits the arc defined by the selected control points, the center point of the arc is determined (392). Further, the radius of arc is determined (393).

10 FIG. 3G is a block diagram showing a display window 427 depicting the profile of a work piece 85. In this diagram the work piece is semi-circular in shape. An arc of interest has been identified by selection box 314. The selection box 314 may be generated/drawn via a pointing device using known techniques of clicking and dragging to produce a box of appropriate proportions.
15 The radius R is determined and displayed and denoted as 2.63 by indicia 316. Similarly the coordinates for the center point 315 are identified as 25.6; 12.4 by indicia 317.

Measurement Module – Degree of Fit

20 FIG. 3H is a flowchart illustrating a method of identifying portions of a work piece that do not meet a predetermined specification via matching a captured profile with a reference template. In this method, data describing a profile of a work piece of interest is received (394). This profile data is then compared with reference data (reference template) that describes predetermined specifications (395). In a preferred embodiment, the reference template may be stored into memory associated with the control unit 300. A determination is made as to whether or not the captured profile data varies from the specifications set out by the reference template (396). An output is then generated to cause indicia signifying portions of the work piece represented by the captured profile data, that fail to meet the specifications of the reference template to be displayed on an associated display device 425 (397).

FIG. 3I is a block diagram showing a window display 427 in which a

5 graphic representation of a profile of a work piece 85 is displayed along with a graphic representation of the profile of a reference template 319 (reference profile). In this example, the work piece profile does not match the reference template 318 (i.e. the profile of the work piece 85 does not meet the specifications described by the reference template 318). With reference to FIG.
10 3J, indicia 319, 320 and 321 are displayed to indicate the areas in which the work piece profile fail to conform to the reference profile 319. These indicia may be, for example, denoted as vectors which vary in length in order to indicate the relative magnitude of the variance/error between the captured profile of the work piece and the reference profile 319. Alternatively, the indicia may be denoted so
15 as to indicate the existence of variance/error, without any magnitude being presented.

Template Matching Module

Template matching module 370 (FIG. 3A) is configured to transform the 20 co-ordinate space of the sensor chassis 200 and a reference template into a like co-ordinate system. This allows stored instructions for the control point determinations to be properly applied. It also allows for degree of fit analysis to be performed. The reference template may be stored as data onto memory associated with the control unit 300. In one embodiment, the reference template 25 will describe the desired profile and one or more tools for evaluating the captured work piece profile. For example, where the width of a portion of the work piece profile is to be measured, the reference template may include data indicating what measurements of the captured work profile are desired. Further, the reference template may include data to identify control points along the captured 30 work piece profile that should be used in carrying out the specified measurement(s).

In order to make the comparison of captured profile data with a reference

5 template, it is necessary to correlate the captured reference profile with the reference template or vice versa. More particularly, in order to evaluate the captured profile data in view of the reference template, it is necessary that the coordinate space in which the captured profile data is described be correlated to the coordinate space in which the reference template is described. This
10 correlation may be established in several ways. In one method a translation of the captured profile data is carried out to bring the the data points represented by the captured profile data into a space common with the data points represented by the reference template. Once the translation has been made, the captured profile data is rotated about a predetermined center point to find the angle that
15 provides the best direct correlation between the captured profile data and the reference template. The best correlation between captured profile data and the reference template may be referred to as the best match quality. This method is further described by the flowchart shown in FIG. 3H.

20 With reference to FIG. 3K the smallest circle that can enclose the data points represented by the captured profile data is determined and the center point of that circle (minimal enclosing circle) is determined (360). Similarly, the smallest circle that can enclose all of the data points represented by the reference template is determined. The center point of this circle is then
25 determined (361). A common position is established between the center point of the circle enclosing the profile data points and the center point of the circle enclosing the reference template data points (362). The captured data points are then rotated in relation to the reference data pointes (363). Preferably they will be rotated a predetermined amount (step). The average variance (magnitude of
30 the distance) between the captured data points and the reference profile will be determined (364). If the points have not been rotated a full 360° in relation to the reference data points, then the captured data points will again (365) be rotated a predetermined amount (363) and the average variance will again be determined

5 at each point (364). This will continue until the points have been rotated a full 360° (365). In a preferred embodiment, the captured data points are rotated in 1° increments/steps and the average variance determined at each step. It will be recognized that any increment may be used as may be desired, however the more steps the greater the accuracy of the results. Once the rotation has been
10 completed, a determination will be made as to which of the step positions provided the smallest average variance between captured data points and reference template data points (366). The correlation between the coordinate space of the captured profile and the reference template is then established and the captured profile may be compared with the reference template to determine
15 whether it meets pre-established acceptance limits or tolerances. The precision of this correlation may be further increased by repeating the process over a more limited range, but with smaller steps.

Registration and Correlation

20 In order to allow for proper display of profile representations and to allow for accurate calculation and measurement functions to be carried out, it is necessary that the coordinate space defined by the 2-dimensional environment of each contour sensor 210, 212, 214 and 216 be correlated with the coordinate space of the sensor chassis 200. This correlation is established during a "registration" process.
25

Registration Module

30 The registration module 368 is configured to establish a correlation between a first coordinate space and a second coordinate space. More particularly, the registration module is configured to establish a correlation between the data representing a profile captured by each of the contour sensors (210, 212, 214 and/or 216) and a common coordinate space. This correlation is typically established during a registration mode, in which a known "target" (FIG.

5 4A and FIG. 4B) having known dimensions and characteristics is placed within
the work zone 75 of the sensor chassis 200 and the profile thereof is captured.
Based upon the captured profile data and known characteristics of the target a
correlation is established between a first coordinate space and a second
coordinate space which can subsequently be used to transform a given point
10 within the first coordinate space into a point within the second coordinate space.

Profile data captured by each sensor unit 210 is described in terms of the
coordinate space (sensor coordinate space) of the particular sensor unit. Since
each sensor unit 210, 212, 214 and 216 is positioned and aligned differently with
15 respect to the work zone 85, profile data generated by each sensor unit will be
described in terms of the coordinate space relevant to the particular sensor unit.
Thus, a coordinate value of, for example, (135, 72) output by sensor unit 210, will
not correspond to the point described by a coordinate value (135, 72) output by
sensor unit 214. This is illustrated in FIG. 3L where the point P2 can be seen
20 to have a coordinate value of (1.75, 3.5) in the chassis space (defined by the X,Y
axes) and a coordinate value of (3', 15') in the sensor space (defined by the X',Y'
axes).

During the registration process, the registration module 368 carries out
25 functions associated with establishing a correlation between a first coordinate
space and a second coordinate space. The first coordinate space may be, for
example, the coordinate space of the sensor unit (sensor coordinate space),
while the second coordinate space may be a common coordinate space, such as
the chassis coordinate space.

30

FIG. 3M is a flowchart illustrating a method of registration. In this process,
a registration target is positioned within the work zone 75 of the sensor chassis
200 (398) (FIG. 4D). FIG. 4A and FIG. 4B are block diagrams illustrating a

5 registration target 475. FIG. 4C is a diagram illustrating a registration target 475 positioned within a sensor chassis 200.

With reference to FIG. 3M, FIG. 3N, FIG. 4A, FIG. 4B, FIG. 4C and FIG. 4D, the target 475 is aligned within the work zone 75 in a predetermined manner 10 (399). In one embodiment shown in FIG. 4D, where the target is comprised of a first cylinder 480 and a second cylinder 482, the target 475 is aligned so that the centers of the two cylinders are aligned along one of the main axis's (Y axis) of the sensor chassis coordinate system. The coordinates in the sensor coordinate system for the centers of each cylinder 480 and 482 are determined (400). This 15 may be determined by performing a fit-to-circle regression on the data representing points (P1 – P6) along the circumference of the cylinders 480 and 482. The angle of the line formed between the centers of cylinder 480 and 482 and the Y' axis of the sensor coordinate space is T theta. Translational parameters are then determined (401). The translational parameters may be 20 determined by applying the rotational transform established by T theta to the coordinates of the center of cylinder 480 (CTR 1) and the cylinder 482 (CTR 2). The location of the midpoint between CTR 1 and CTR 2 has been rotated but not translated. This intermediate coordinate system can be considered to have an X" and Y" axis which are parallel to the X and Y axes of the chassis coordinate 25 system. The x", y" values of the midpoint then correspond to Tx and Ty. The translation parameters may also be referred to as correlation data.

Correlation Module

The correlation module 364 is configured to translate or otherwise 30 transform a point within a first coordinate space (such as the screen view of the contour sensor/sensor coordinate space) to a second (common) coordinate space based upon a pre-established relationship between the first coordinate space and the second coordinate space. In one example, the first coordinate

5 space is the coordinate space of the sensor unit, while the second coordinate space is the coordinate space of the sensor chassis. The established relationship may be described by translational parameters such as those established during the registration process as described above with respect to FIG. 3L. In one embodiment, the translational parameters may be used to 10 generate correlation data that may be stored into memory associated with the control unit 300 as, for example, a transform matrix or a look up table (LUT). This correlation data may then be used to determine a coordinate value in the second coordinate space for a given coordinate value from a first coordinate space.

15

FIG. 3O illustrates an embodiment of a control unit 300. In this embodiment, control 300 includes a processor 302, a local interface bus 304, storage memory 306 for storing electronic format instructions (software) 305 and data 308. Storage memory 306 may include both volatile and non-volatile 20 memory. An input/output interface 340 may be provided for interfacing with and communicating data received from/to, for example, a network 114 or input devices such as a keyboard 320 or pointing device 325. Input/output interface 340 may also be configured to interface with, for example, graphics processor 345. Graphics processor 345 may be provided for carrying out the processing of 25 graphic information for display in accordance with instructions from processor 302.

Processor 302 accesses data stored in memory 306 in accordance with, for example, software 305 stored on memory 306. Processor 302 may be 30 configured to receive user input from an input device such as keyboard 320 or pointing device 325 and generate a command based upon the user input. Processor 302 may also be configured to place the command into a predetermined format, such as, for example, extensible mark-up language

5 format, in accordance with software 905 stored in memory 916. Processor 302 may be further configured to forward the command to the sensor chassis 200 and to subsequently receive a response from the sensor chassis 200. The processor 302 may be further configured to carry out the functions of the visualization module 310, the video viewing module 311, reporting module 312 and/or management module 313 in accordance with software 905 stored in memory 316. The software 305 may include, for example, one or more applications, configured to carry out various processes according to the methodology described by the flowcharts of FIG. 3B, 3D, 3F, 3H, 3I, 3J and/or 3N.

15 In a preferred embodiment, the control unit 300 is configured to correlate a point within the coordinate system of the sensor chassis (chassis coordinate system) with a point in a sensor coordinate space. Further, the control unit 230 may be configured to provide for display of a representation of the chassis coordinate space and the profile of a detected work piece that is within the work 20 zone 75.

25 Data representing the correlation between a first coordinate space and a second coordinate space (correlation data) may be stored locally on memory associated with the control unit 300, or remotely stored on memory accessible by the control unit 300 via a network 114. Control unit 300 is configured to receive user input and to issue commands to the sensor chassis 200. Commands may be issued by the control unit 300 based upon user input, or upon the occurrence of predetermined events/changes or other criteria.

30 The control unit 300 may be configured to request data from the sensor chassis 200. Similarly, the control unit 300 may be configured to receive video a data as well as coordinate data from the sensor chassis 200. The control unit 300 of the present invention can be implemented in hardware, software,

5 firmware, or a combination thereof. In the preferred embodiment(s), the control unit 300 is implemented in software or firmware that is stored in a memory and that is executed by a suitable instruction execution system. If implemented in hardware, as in an alternative embodiment, the control system 300 can be implemented with any or a combination of the following technologies, which are
10 all well known in the art: a discrete logic circuit(s) having logic gates for implementing logic functions upon data signals, an application specific integrated circuit having appropriate logic gates, a programmable gate array(s) (PGA), a fully programmable gate array (FPGA), etc.

15 The flow charts of FIG. 3B, 3D, 3F, 3H, 3I, 3J and/or 3N show the architecture, functionality, and operation of a possible implementation of the software 905 (FIG. 3O). In this regard, each block represents a module, segment, or portion of code, which comprises one or more executable instructions for implementing the specified logical function(s). It should also be
20 noted that in some alternative implementations, the functions noted in the blocks may occur out of the order noted in the flowcharts. For example, two blocks shown in succession in the flowcharts may in fact be executed substantially concurrently or the blocks may sometimes be executed in the reverse order, depending upon the functionality involved. The software program stored as
25 software 305, which comprises a listing of executable instructions (either ordered or non-ordered) for implementing logical functions, can be embodied in any computer-readable medium for use by or in connection with an instruction execution system, apparatus, or device, such as a computer-based system, processor-containing system, or other system that can fetch the instructions from
30 the instruction execution system, apparatus, or device and execute the instructions. In the context of this document, a "computer-readable medium" can be any means that can contain, store, communicate, propagate, or transport the program for use by or in connection with the instruction execution system,

5 apparatus, or device. The computer-readable medium can be, for example but not limited to, an electronic, magnetic, optical, electromagnetic, infrared, or semiconductor system, apparatus, device, or propagation medium. More specific examples (a non-exhaustive list) of the computer-readable medium would include the following: an electrical connection (electronic) having one or more wires, a
10 portable computer diskette (magnetic), a random access memory (RAM) (magnetic or non-magnetic), a read-only memory (ROM) (magnetic or non-magnetic), an erasable programmable read-only memory (EPROM or Flash memory), an optical fiber (optical), and a portable compact disc read-only memory (CDROM) (optical or magneto-optical). Note that the computer-readable
15 medium could even be paper or another suitable medium upon which the program is printed, as the program can be electronically captured, via for instance, optical scanning of the paper or other medium, then compiled, interpreted or otherwise processed in a suitable manner, if necessary, and then stored in a computer memory.

20

It will be recognized by those skilled in the art, that while certain aspects of the invention have been described in terms of hardware, it is possible and fully anticipated that such aspects can be implemented in software, and vice-a-versa. All such variations or implementations are fully contemplated by the present
25 invention and are intended to fall within the scope of the invention.

It should be emphasized that the above-described embodiments of the present invention, particularly, any "preferred" embodiments, are merely possible examples of implementations, merely set forth for a clear understanding of the
30 principles of the invention. Many variations and modifications may be made to the above-described embodiment(s) of the invention without departing substantially from the spirit and principles of the invention. All such modifications

5 and variations are intended to be included herein within the scope of the present
invention and protected by the following claims.